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ABSTRACT

This book addresses the counterproductive conditions in which part-time and non-tenure-track composition faculty must teach, using case studies, local narratives, and models for ethical employment practices. It presents and evaluates a range of proactive strategies for change, both for local conditions and broader considerations. Section 1, Transforming the Cultural and Material Conditions of Contingent Writing Faculty: The Personal and the Institutional, includes the following 5 chapters: (1) "Shadows of the Mountain" (Chris M. Anson and Richard Jewell); (2) "Non-Tenure-Track Instructors at UALR: Breaking Rules, Splitting Departments" (Barry M. Maid); (3) "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times: One Version of the 'Humane' Lectureship" (Eva Brumberger); (4) "The Material and the Cultural as Interconnected Texts: Revising Material Conditions for Part-Time Faculty at Syracuse University" (Carol Lipson and Molly Voorheis); and (5) "Trafficking in Freeway Flyers: (Re)Viewing Literacy, Working Conditions, and Quality Instruction" (Helen O'Grady). Section 2, Collectivity and Change in Non-Tenure-Track Employment: Collective Bargaining, Coalition Building, and Community Organizing, contains the following 6 chapters: (6) "The Real Scandal in Higher Education" (Walter Jacobsohn); (7) "Faculty at the Crossroads: Making the Part-Time Problem a Full-Time Focus" (Karen Thompson); (8) "How Did We Get in This Fix? A Personal Account of the Shift to a Part-Time Faculty in a Leading Two-Year College District" (John C. Lovas); (9) "A Place to Stand: The Role of Unions in the Development of Writing Programs" (Nicholas Tingle and Judy Kirscht); (10) "Same Struggle, Same Fight: A Case Study of University Students and Faculty United in Labor Activism" (Elana Peled, Diana Hines, Michael John Martin, Anne Stafford, Brian Strang, Mary Winegarden, and Melanie Wise); and (11) "Climbing a Mountain: An Adjunct Steering Committee Brings Change to Bowling Green State University's English Department" (Debra A. Benko). Section 3, Rethinking Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Roles and Rewards, contains the following 3 chapters: (12) "Distance Education: Political and Professional Agency for Adjunct and Part-Time Faculty, and GTAs" (Danielle DeVoss, Dawn Hayden,

Cynthia L. Selfe, and Richard J. Selfe, Jr.); (13) "The Scholarship of Teaching: Contributions from Contingent Faculty" (Patricia Lambert Stock, Amanda Brown, David Franke, and John Starkweather); and (14) "What's the Bottom-Line? Literacy and Quality Education in the Twenty-First Century" (Eileen E. Schell). Contains over 800 references, including the appendix: "Select Bibliography: Contingent Labor Issues in Composition Studies and Higher Education" (Margaret M. Cunniffe and Eileen E. Schell), which consists of approximately 600 items. (EF)

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Edited by
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National Council of Teachers of English

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TRANSFORMING THE ROLE OF

CONTINGENT FACULTY IN

COMPOSITION-STUDIES

AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Edited by Eileen E. Schell and

Patricia Lambert Stock 3

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Moving a Mountain

*Transforming the Role of Contingent
Faculty in Composition Studies and
Higher Education*



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*From Eileen Schell—
For Connie Hale,
my first-year composition teacher,
whose intellectual guidance and inspirational pedagogy
changed my life*

*From Patti Stock—
For Vernon Robert Lambert,
an exploited worker,
and
Vernon Robert Lambert Jr.,
a gifted teacher and union leader*

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A Place to Stand: The Role of Unions in the Development of Writing Programs

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JUDY KIRSCHT

University of California, Santa Barbara

For over ten years, several times each quarter, a group of librarians and lecturers—nontenured and nontenurable faculty at the University of California at Santa Barbara—have gathered late on Friday afternoons. Collectively, these are the formally elected officers of the University Council of the American Federation of Teachers (UC-AFT) local executive board. Similar locals meet on each of the eight campuses of the University of California system. We meet to figure out what can and should be done about the following such questions:

- ◆ Who has and who has not written articles for the Local's quarterly publication, the *Forward*
- ◆ Where can we find another student recruiter to help get more lecturers and librarians to join the Union
- ◆ What is the time line for starting a grievance against the UCSB administration for unilaterally declaring that lecturers shall get no more merit raises

Over the years the people on the executive board have changed. Some participate for a year or two, some for three or four, a couple for more than ten years. The issues change constantly. Some have been insignificant; some have gone to the heart

of working conditions for lecturers and librarians. Always the intent of the board has been to oversee and protect the labor rights of lecturers and librarians as stated in the UC-AFT contract (the Memorandum of Understanding or MOU) as it is defined through ongoing negotiations with the statewide administration of the University of California.

At meetings of our local board, we are regarded, by our younger colleagues, as old hands. Tingle was present at the inception of the union; most of his "leisure" time, from 1983 to 1986, was spent in union meetings, walking the campus, distributing flyers, knocking on doors, and posting notices. He continues to recollect with amazement the fear unionizing seemed to provoke among members of the Senate Faculty, some of whom indicated they no longer felt free to speak to him (as if he were a spy), and among his colleagues. Kirscht joined the union in 1988, served as president of the local from 1991 to 1993, and as southern vice president for the statewide organization from 1993 to 1996. For Kirscht, working with the union has represented a baptism by fire into the institutional workings of the university. While she swung, at times, between anxiety and terror, the experience increased her confidence that unions can make a difference. If freedom is, as Hegel said, the recognition of necessity, then Tingle and Kirscht, in union work, have recognized a necessity and exercised a freedom.

Our purpose, however, is not to recount our personal experiences but to explain why lecturers of the University of California system unionized, to discuss how unionization affected the development of one UC writing program, and, most important, to show how unionization has affected the ideals and self-concepts of lecturers working in a large research university system. Lecturers are hired to teach within institutions where research is valued above all else and where status, among those who do research, is measured by how few classes one teaches. The teaching-centered professional interests of composition lecturers simply do not coincide with the interests of the research institution. The result is an invisible wall, as real and as corrosive as any class barrier, between those who teach (particularly those who teach "skills" rather than "content"), and those who conduct research. Those who teach skills are, by definition, temporary, needed only

to remediate students' deficient high school education and not considered bona fide members of the university community.

Unionization has taught us this hard lesson. Few of us started our academic careers believing that universities operated with values similar to those of Dow Chemical. Most of us yearned for the protected environments higher education seemed to afford. Working with the union, however, has shown us that for nontenurable faculty, the university has values no different from any other corporation. Lecturers enjoy less job security than researchers, than staff, than groundskeepers—all of these workers are considered more central to the mission of the university than those who teach writing, elementary math, or beginning foreign languages.

The iron law governing the employment of lecturers, and all "temps" for that matter, has been and always will be economics. We are not privy, of course, to the university's official thinking on the issue, but a look at the prevailing economic conditions of the late seventies suggests why the university began to use the lecturer hiring category. By 1979, the halcyon days of indefinite expansion that had characterized the fifties and sixties were over. The university, constrained by drops in state revenues after the passing of Proposition 13, which limited property tax revenues, began to tighten its belt. But the belt was hard to tighten. The system was "tenure-heavy." This heaviness, in turn, hampered "programmatic flexibility." Students, meanwhile, voting with their feet, flocked to universities and to departments within universities most likely to enhance career prospects. Departments of business-economics bloomed; classics wilted.

The hiring of faculty under the rarely used job classification of "visiting lecturer" appears to have been a short-term solution to these problems. Theoretically the classification might allow quick hires for departments like business-economics in need of persons to teach accounting, and quick fires, once the exigency passed. In practice, while departments across campus made use of the classification, pools of lecturers began to form, especially in English departments, where writing was taught and in the languages where instructors were needed for introductory courses. In 1979, the UCSB English department had three or four visiting lecturers; by 1984 it had fifty, most of whom were on 100 percent

nonemergency one-year renewable appointments, all teaching eight classes a year exclusively in the freshman writing sequence.

While the university administration viewed the use of lecturers as a response to a short-term economic need, these faculty, in fact, were meeting long-term educational needs that the traditional research faculty had little interest in or competence to fill. Theorists in economics were not accounting teachers, theorists of French literature were not language teachers, and theorists in English literature were not composition teachers. While lecturers were increasingly hired as professional educators, the university administration remained wedded to a view of lecturers as satisfying a short-term economic need. This view was perhaps reinforced by the fanciful notion that, if suddenly and for no apparent reason the quality of entering students dramatically improved, there would be no need for teachers at all.

Lecturers were hired on what were officially described as one-year "self-terminating" contracts. "Self-terminating" meant the university legally did not have to give cause, explanation, or reason should it decide not to renew a contract. Indeed, one strict interpretation of "self-terminating" suggested that the university neither had to give cause nor did it have to tell the lecturer that his or her contract had not been renewed. If a lecturer did not receive a new one-year contract, he or she would make the logical inference that the contract had "self-terminated." An instructor receiving a contract had to keep in mind the self-terminating nature of the contract and its term limitations; after one had received eight such contracts, one would never receive another. In 1983, the university reduced the number of such contracts one could receive from eight to four. This became known as the "four years and you are out" rule.

The imposition of this ceiling was the trigger to the unionization of lecturers in the UC system. In 1983, the American Federation of Teachers took this "rule," at its own expense and at its own initiative, before the California Public Employee Relations Board, (PERB), the state appointed board of lawyers and judges that hears all labor disputes. The board ruled the policy illegal (*University Council*, 1983). In the predownsizing world of 1982, the board, whose experience was mostly in labor law, could find no rational reason for firing a competent instructor to be replaced

by another person with no experience, only because the experienced person had served four years. This decision taught the lecturers of the UC an important lesson: the university's employment practices were not considered rational beyond the walls of the ivory tower and the courts were willing to face off with the university. In the years that followed, we saw this lesson repeated over and over.

In 1983, on the basis of this widely publicized victory, the AFT ran for and won ratification from the vast majority of lecturers as the official representative of all lecturers in the UC system. After two years of arduous negotiations—during which the university denied the need for trained teachers and claimed lecturers were not faculty—a contract was hammered out (*FORWARD*, 1). The hammering was done on the university side primarily by a former labor organizer, to whom the university paid \$70,000 a year, and on the AFT side, by four lecturers pro bono. Because the university would allow no release time for the lecturer negotiators, all, under the stress of work and biweekly negotiating sessions, were warned by their personal physicians to drop out of the negotiating team before they irreparably damaged their health. For others who follow this road to unionization, we would add a second lesson: never try to bargain with the university without both legal and union professionals at the table. The imbalance of power and experience at the table resulted in a final contract that was probably among the weakest ever produced in the history of American labor.

Despite its weaknesses, however, that first contract initiated changes in lecturers' and librarians' lives. Though lecturers traded away, for example, the right to strike, the contract did spell out in clear and enforceable detail that lecturers, after six years of one-year self-terminating contracts, were eligible to be reviewed for three-year contracts. If a lecturer was judged excellent in the three categories of teaching, professional development, and program service, he or she would receive a three-year contract, renewable indefinitely as long as the lecturer continued to perform at a level of excellence and, most important, as long as the position for which he or she was hired continued to exist. If the lecturer did not pass the performance review, he or she was severed from the university and could not be rehired at that campus.

This key article of the MOU, it was hoped, would satisfy the university's fear that unionization meant the retention of inferior personnel while insuring those who did pass the review a reasonably stable professional life.

Without the union, without the contract, without the possibility of job security for lecturers, the Santa Barbara Writing Program as it now exists would not have been possible. Though the lecturer faculty had been growing for years, the teaching of writing was still considered an occasional occupation for graduate students in English. No program and no sense of the teaching of writing as a distinct and professional enterprise had developed or could have developed under preunion circumstances. The interests of graduate students and the department in which they worked rested with literature. Nor would the "floating bottom" of lecturers on one-year self-terminating contracts have afforded the kind of personnel necessary to establish a permanent program. The self-interests of persons on such contracts would and should lie with their personal and professional futures and not with a writing program from which they would be fired in four years. The contract and the possibility it presented of extended employment made possible a convergence of self-interest and program development.

This is not to say that unionization alone made program growth possible. Though it was an essential brick in the edifice, a number of other factors were at work also. In 1984, before the contract but not before the prospect of unionization had reared its head, the English department created the position of co-chair in charge of lecturers and the writing sequence, which at that time was a two-quarter first-year sequence (three quarters for those who did not pass the UC assessment exam). The position, moreover, was given to the only person in the department with professional expertise in writing, and an office was constructed in the English complex to house this person. Lecturers received their mail in the English department mailroom, but their mail slots were separated from those of the tenured and tenurable faculty by a large orange strip.

The creation of the position of co-chair, the new office, and the orange strip suggest Max Weber's iron law of bureaucracy was already at work. The situation was being "rationalized."

Oranges and apples, the law holds, cannot be kept in the same container; lecturers in composition and the tenured faculty in literature were apples and oranges. Unionization in 1986 drove home that fact. The possibility that lecturers might be in place for an unpredictable number of years meant that they might begin, willy-nilly, to exert a degree of influence on department affairs, even though they were allowed to serve on no department committees. Moreover, the instructor review process instituted by the contract would drain the resources of English department staff and possibly the time of English department faculty. In a scene Weber might have predicted, lecturers arrived at work one morning in 1988 to find that their offices and mailboxes, along with their chair, had been moved to another floor.

Though it would take five years, an external review, an internal review, and the report of a Senate Faculty committee to turn the de facto separation of the writing program from the English department into an institutional reality, it became clear far sooner that this "rejection" by the English department was another essential brick in the building of an autonomous program. During that period, the English department chair continued to sign the contracts of lecturers, but the everyday reality was one of separation and independence. The co-chair, with the assistance of lecturers, ran the daily affairs of the program. Committees were put in place, one for each of the different writing courses taught, and lecturers served on the central administrative committee.

Less dramatically, but significant still, lecturers lobbied for and eventually acquired a telephone in each office, albeit with two and sometimes three people on the same extension. They obtained developmental grants for the study of pedagogy. One group of five lecturers, dubbed the "videocell," used their grant to videotape their classes; over the course of a year, biweekly discussions of pedagogy followed. Eventually, the group produced an instructional video, wrote and published two articles. Lecturers, as a whole, began to subscribe to the journals pertinent to the discipline of composition, and (usually at their own expense, since they were denied access to travel money) they attended and presented research at professional conventions. Buoyed by the contract and the possibility of security that it afforded, lecturers in the late eighties began to view themselves as participants in a

professional discipline and to build the foundations of an autonomous program, which was officially recognized in 1991.

While under the institutional control of the English department, the writing program faculty saw themselves as serving the needs of the English department, as teaching what the English department faculty did not want to teach, and as serving as training faculty for English department teaching assistants. Granted relative autonomy, the program began to assert its own definition. New lecturers, for example, were hired for their education and teaching experience, and the program began to see itself as serving the general student population. "Service" ceased to be a dirty word; indeed, the writing program became one of the few places on campus where teaching was the primary value.

This evolution occurred, however, without the blessings of the institution and was not bloodless. Indeed, the signing of the first UC-AFT contract in 1986 marked the beginning of a four-year court battle between the union and the university. In 1987, when those lecturers who had already served six years came up for the first performance reviews under the contract, the university's strategy became clear. On three campuses (Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and Santa Cruz) they denied that the positions held by all but a handful of the eligible lecturers were needed, insisting that new appointees could fill them just as well. The Santa Barbara administration justified its action as the need for "fresh blood." Though it was not clear whether this referred to the need for a transfusion (understandable on a "tenure-heavy" campus) or a good meal, this interpretation of "need" essentially eviscerated the contract. On the Santa Barbara campus, ten of fourteen lecturers were denied review. Clearly the university had set up a quota.

The UC-AFT immediately filed "Unfair Labor Practice" charges against the UC administration on two campuses, Los Angeles and Santa Cruz, adding Santa Barbara to the list a year later (*University Council*, 1987/1988). The ensuing four-year legal battle over the words "long-term need" could not have been carried on without the extraordinary endurance and commitment of the executive director (who was himself a lecturer who had been denied review) and the council president, a lecturer in the speech department at UCLA. Collaboration with the librarians

also proved invaluable, for they provided stability during those rocky years. Though they had battles of their own, no such battle threatened their professional existence as the attacks on lecturers did. They, as we were fond of saying in those days, "had real jobs." Equally important was the necessity of belonging to a large nationwide union. The AFT and CFT (the California branch of the AFT) paid two-thirds of the legal costs of that and other battles. Though the University Council has recently come to question the fit between the AFT and the interests of UC lecturers, the lecturers could not have carried on their initial battle with the university without the funds afforded by the national union.

As the court battle dragged on, the novice union members became seasoned veterans. At both council and local levels, lecturers learned to read labor contracts and file grievances. The lessons learned during this period may save other nascent unions a good many casualties. Most important, locals learned not to give up in the face of the weak contract. The locals that filed grievances against their administrations, whether or not they thought they could win, kept their programs fairly well intact simply because the administrators knew they would be challenged. Where there was no one to pay attention or no one willing to fight, programs were decimated. Giant though it is, the university of California behaves differently when it knows it is being watched.

Furthermore, union boards learned that the system has two Achilles' heels. First, granted almost total autonomy by law, the UC does not like outside public agencies (like PERB) meddling in its affairs. Its claimed need for "academic freedom" was truly its most powerful weapon against contract restraints; however, the union members present felt that by using that weapon indiscriminately to thwart every request for commitment to its teaching faculty, the administration conveyed the attitude of being unaccountable to anyone, including the court.

Second, the university does not like adverse publicity. Campus units that made sure their local presses and radio stations received news of mass firings, or mass refusal to review lecturers for three-year appointments, made sure their administrative officers had to face the press and explain their actions. Universities are loath to appear as less than model employers or as less than

fully committed to the education of the public's children. The university, the union found, would far rather deal with the lecturers than explain to the public why they were firing experienced teachers simply because they had served competently for six years.

The years 1989-91 marked a watershed in both the systemwide union battle and the local struggle of the UCSB Writing Program. In 1989, the court decided in favor of the UC-AFT in the Santa Cruz and Los Angeles cases, and the UCSB program review committee of the Academic Senate recommended granting autonomy to the writing program. The administrative law judges of PERB stated the university had not made a case that there was any "programmatic need" (academic freedom to establish and eliminate programs) to deny lecturers review for three-year contracts. According to the court, the fact that the university could not see changes in need into the indefinite future was not sufficient cause to deny three-year need, and that the university's ability to change programs was sufficiently protected by the existing contract (*University Council*, 1987). After an offer to settle with the union on weaker terms aborted, the university appealed the decision, promising another long delay. Nevertheless, the message was clear: the courts were not sympathetic to the university's case.

On the local front, the recommendation of autonomy and the subsequent granting of that status by the UCSB College of Letters and Science had a profound effect on the writing program. Free of its institutional tie to the English department, it could now address its university-wide function. Under the leadership of its own lecturer with security of employment (a tenured position), the faculty set about writing its own program goals. By faculty committee consensus, it replaced the literature-based courses with a writing-across-the-disciplines approach to composition instruction, while spreading the two quarters' required sequence across the four years and developing upper-level writing courses in academic and professional specialties. It initiated new relationships with other campus departments by linking its introductory-level courses to general education courses across campus and in the engineering school. It gained the right to accept or reject graduate student teaching assistants from the

English department based on their performance in composition and to require training in composition as a condition of employment. In addition, the program began to recruit teaching assistants from departments other than English. In 1993, it earned the right to review its own personnel cases. After ten years of struggle, composition lecturers had finally won the right to have their performance judged by their peers, rather than by faculty with no knowledge of composition.

In 1991, with the Santa Barbara case still pending at PERB, the UCSB administration made its last effort to deny the need for long-term lecturers, refusing to review two writing program faculty. The UCSB local, through the council, filed a new "Unfair Labor Practice" charge (*University Council*, 1991). Throughout the court years, the leaders of the UCSB local had argued that, where educational program goals depended primarily on lecturers, continuity was necessary to create programs of academic excellence. This argument seemed eventually to gain credence with administrators. The granting of autonomy to the UCSB program was, of course, a great boon to this argument. Whether the program had indeed helped prove the case or whether the systemwide administration had simply lost confidence in its ability to win at PERB, they offered to settle both the old and new charges out of court. When their original offer to simply save the two lecturers' positions was refused, they accepted the union's demand for a real policy change. They stated simply that (at the UCSB campus only) if the courses formed a permanent part of university requirement and were taught primarily by lecturers that would constitute "need" for a long-term position and entitle the lecturer to review. Thus ended the "needs" battle at UCSB. At this one campus, at least, the need for long-term lecturers to fulfill on-going needs of the university became an accepted fact of life. Both UCSB lecturers and administrators have enjoyed five years of relative labor peace. One attempt to deny merit increases to lecturers was turned back by PERB (*University Council*, 1994), but most grievances have been settled at the local level. Though such settlements were not ideal, they have wrought small improvements in the working lives of lecturers and in their institutional identities. For example, lecturers have also won nonvoting seats on faculty legislature committees and service on these com-

mittees has afforded invaluable opportunities. Lecturers have become more visible to their senate faculty colleagues and more knowledgeable about the intricate and sometimes arcane workings of the university administration.

This radical change, of course, would have been impossible had the UCSB administration not accepted the settlement and acted in good faith in the ensuing years. This has not been the story on all campuses. When the appeal decision was handed down on the original cases, the university won back some ability to deny review for economic reasons, and writing programs at some of the other campuses did not weather the court battles as well as Santa Barbara. The structure of the campuses, the location of the writing programs and the administrations' attitude and strategies also varied. At some campuses there were not enough lecturers to provide a critical mass. In short, the reasons for the uneven results were not monolithic, though California's economic crisis of 1990-96 surely played a major role on all campuses. On the Santa Barbara campus, the writing program now numbers twenty-three full-time lecturers, rather than fifty, and the library has lost some twenty positions.

Much of the turmoil can be laid at the door of the university regents' chosen method of dealing with California's recent economic crisis. Basically, the regents bailed out the system with retirement funds, offering repeated "golden handshakes" to senior faculty in order to hire cheaper, younger faculty. This thrice-repeated technique decapitated departments all over the system, leading to a desperate scramble for positions and recruitment monies. In this scramble, the "soft money" used to hire lecturers and librarians diminished. Cost-of-living salary increases for lecturers and librarians, which had traditionally been the same as for tenurable faculty, were "decoupled" to free funds for recruiting. The librarians, whose contract came up for negotiation first, fought valiantly against this amendment and won some measure of equity back; nonetheless, the salary gap has certainly widened.

The University of California behaves more and more openly like the corporate giant it is. Harvesting enough funds for super-science faculty and labs means hiring more and more part-time temporary faculty to fill the holes left in the classrooms. Furthermore, new titles are appearing on faculty rosters; at UCLA, 40

percent of the undergraduate classes are taught by persons with "visiting" and "adjunct" titles, suggesting that new classes of temporary faculty are being created. The union is currently exploring the nature of this new "hidden" faculty and its contracts. But the very capacity of the university to invent new hiring categories for "temps" may make the relative stability of union membership and three-year contracts look more attractive to academic faculty than it has in the past.

Against this backdrop, the UCSB Writing Program continues a steady, if somewhat schizophrenic, growth. On the one hand, the writing program now offers a minor in professional writing, and an external review panel of composition experts found the program "cutting edge." On the other hand, the program has lost its quarters to a much smaller unit because those in charge of space during major remodeling forgot that the program existed. The program has negotiated with the English department for further training for graduate students teaching writing—an event that simply could not have happened five years ago—but is so technologically poor that the use of technology in the teaching of writing is stymied.

Despite all of this, however, the UCSB Writing Program has a degree of stability, autonomy, and acceptance rare for programs staffed with non-tenure-track faculty, certainly rare in the UC system. This success is not accidental. Key to the program's survival and growth are these events: (1) collective action (the union won three-year contracts that provided a permanent faculty); (2) separation from the English department, where its interests could never be primary; (3) development of a cross-disciplinary curriculum, including linked classes that took program faculty out of their isolated ghettos and built relationships across campus; (4) membership on university-wide committees, giving program faculty increased visibility and therefore gradual acceptance as an integral part of the university community.

None of this means the existence of a separate writing program can be taken for granted; none of this means UCSB's tenured faculty considers us peers. What it does mean is that helpless acceptance of an underclass role is suicidal; we must maintain the attitude that created the union and sustained it through its infancy. UCLA Writing Program lecturer, Susan Griffin, (also past

council president and recently appointed state coordinator of the UC-AFT), expressed this attitude perfectly when asked how she got into union work: "I'm from Chicago. I'm Irish. I don't like to be pushed around" (1997, 3).

We realize that the picture we have presented here is not rosy. Perhaps most difficult to accept is that the university is indeed a corporation, and that our lot is not that different from that of other American workers. From executives to line workers, employees are becoming "temps." Historically, a central factor militating against the more inhumane excesses of capitalism has been and continues to be unions and the threat of unionization.

For unions the bottom line always will be a fair wage for a decent day's work. But since their inception, unions have also always been about the attempt of workers to make their labor meaningful. Work at McDonald's is not meaningful. Fry cooks report that they do not have to know how to cook a burger to prepare a Big Mac. They simply respond to a series of bells and whistles that signal when to flip the burgers or turn the buns. They make no decisions. In a scene B. F. Skinner might have admired, a person simply responds to stimuli. If teachers wish to preserve the autonomy of their work and the potentials for commitment and creativity implied in that autonomy, if they wish their work to remain meaningful, unions afford a means by which they may collectively begin to assert control over the circumstances of their labor. Making their work meaningful is inseparable from providing a meaningful education for students.

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